

HELPS FOR STUDENTS OF HISTORY. No. 30

EDITED BY C. JOHNSON, M.A., H. W. V. TEMPERLEY, M.A.,
AND J. P. WHITNEY, D.D., D.C.L.

SEALS

BY

H. S. KINGSFORD, M.A.,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

LONDON

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
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HELP FOR
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[Continued on p. 5.]

SEALS



FIG. 1.—OBVERSE OF SEAL OF ABSENCE OF EDWARD I. (4).

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SEALS

THE word " seal " is used in two different senses—for the die, known as the matrix, with which the impression is made, and for the impression itself. The context generally makes it quite clear in which of these two senses the word is being used, but when there is any doubt it is better to restrict the word " seal " to the impression, and to use the word " matrix " when referring to the die. The word was used just as loosely in the Middle Ages. Roger Mowbray, in his charter to the hospital of Burton Lazars, Leicestershire,¹ says that he has fortified his charter by the impression of his seal (*sigilli mei impressione eam roboravi*), showing that in this case the word was used for the matrix. On the other hand, the common form of attestation, *in cuius rei testimonium sigillum meum apposui*, shows that the word *sigillum* also meant the impression.

The practice of sealing is one of very great antiquity. Matrices, often of cylinder shape, the impression being made by rolling the cylinder on the clay or wax, are found on Babylonian sies, in

¹ Dugdale, *Monasticon*, vi., 633.

Egypt, and in Crete. Gems—that is, a precious or quasi-precious stone with the design in intaglio (incised), the impression being in relief—were also used for sealing in Crete, Greece, and Rome, and these gems are among the finest works of ancient art that have come down to us. With the fall of the Western Empire in the fifth century A.D. the practice of sealing appears to a great extent to have died out in the West, although rude survivals are found amongst some of the Merovingian kings. But under the Carlovingians, from Pippin (died 768) onwards, the practice once again came into full use. In most of these early instances the matrix was an antique gem or a copy of a gem, generally set in a metal rim, on which the inscription was cut. Thus the Emperor Charles the Great (died 814) used a gem with the head of Jupiter Serapis, and in England in the tenth century the counter-seal of the first seal of Durham Cathedral priory was also a gem with the same device. This practice of using antique gems continued right through the Middle Ages, although generally the gem was only used as an accessory to the design. The fine counter-seal (c. 1250) of the Abbey of Waltham Holy Cross has a large gem with the heads of Castor and Pollux, regarded by the canons as those of Harold and Tovi, and two smaller specimens inserted in a large medieval setting.

In England seals were used by Offa (died 796),

Coenwulf (died 821), and one or two other of the early kings and magnates, but the real revival in this country dates from the reign of Edward the Confessor (died 1066), after whom there is an unbroken series of the seals of sovereigns down to the present day. Except, however, for sovereigns, the use of seals was not common until the reign of Henry I., and cannot be said to have become general until that of Henry II. The absence of seals in pre-Conquest England, as compared with their more general use on the Continent, may be illustrated by a statement of Thomas of Elmham, in his history of the monastery of St. Augustine at Canterbury,¹ where he says that Ethelbert and other kings thought it enough to place the sign of the cross on their charters and not to use wax seals. He goes on to state that among the muniments at St. Augustine's none was sealed with a wax seal except one of Knat until after the Conquest, but that all were only signed with the cross.

Various kinds of seals were used by individuals and corporations. The King had his great seal, used for sealing the more important documents, his privy seal, and his signet, not to mention the various seals used by his officers and deputies. Bishops and corporations, whether religious or lay, had a great seal, or seal of dignity, and frequently a seal *ad causas*—that is, a seal for ordinary business.

¹ Rolls Series, 8, p. 118.

The reason for the adoption of a seal *ad causas*, at least by corporations, was that the use and custody of the great seal was often a complicated matter. Many witnesses were necessary to attest its imposition, and the chest in which it was kept was fitted with several keys, each in the custody of a different official. To collect together the various custodians and witnesses was therefore often of some difficulty, and to obviate this, another seal, which did not need so many people to witness or keep it, was provided for use in all except the most important business. There was also a seal known ■ the "secretum," or secret, which may roughly be defined as a private seal, and the signet, generally a ring seal. Both the seal *ad causas*, the secret, and signet, could be used as ■ counter-seal.

The materials of which matrices were made were very varied, but most commonly they were of silver or latten, a material corresponding to brass, but with ■ higher percentage of copper. Matrices were also made of gold, especially for princes—for example, the gold seal of Henry IV. and V.; of ivory, lead, and stone, including precious stones, and even wood.¹ In shape they were usually circular or vesica—that is, pointed oval. It should not be thought, because vesica-shaped seals were used so generally by bishops and ecclesiastical bodies, that the shape has ■ symbolic significance. The reason is that ■

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xviii., 360.

standing figure could more easily be made to fill the design in a seal of this shape than in a round one. The same reason applies to seals with standing figures of ladies, and in both cases the shape of the seal survives, while the character of the device has altered. Oval seals are common after the sixteenth century and occur frequently before that date, while square matrices and others in the form of a shield are also found.

The matrix, when not used in a press, was furnished with a handle, in the earliest example a mere loop at one end. Sometimes the handle consisted of a flange set at right angles to the plane of the matrix in its longer axis, or of a loop of wire bent backwards. More elaborate forms consisted of a loop from which diverged branches arching over the back, as in the handle of the seal of the borough of Burford. Occasionally, as in the privy seal of Joan Beaufort, wife of James I. of Scotland, the handle consists of two semicircular plates affixed along the central line of the back with a hinge. Raised and brought together, these plates served as a handle and lay flat on the back of the matrix when not in use.

By far the most common form of handle for small seals was an eight or six-sided cone terminating in a trefoil or quatrefoil loop for attachment to a chain. A peculiar form of this type of matrix is one in which the centre is made to

screw out by turning the loop. The result is that the centre part of the matrix is made to project about one-eighth of an inch from the remainder, on which is engraved the inscription. Examples are the seals of Bartholomew Endrich, now in the Norwich Museum, with a figure of St. Bartholomew on the centre part, and of Philip de Hambury with a shield of arms. In at least one instance, the seal of Thomas Prayers, the centre part itself screwed right off, leaving another matrix underneath.* In the seventeenth century and later a wooden, ivory, or other handle was inserted in a socket at the back. Instances are known of the back of a matrix being ornamented, as in the seal of Lincoln Cathedral chapter (c. 1180), the front of which is illustrated in Fig. 3, which has a figure of our Lord seated on the rainbow engraved on the back, and of the chapter of Brechin Cathedral (c. 1250), where the back is ornamented with a floral device in high-relief. Instances are also known of a matrix being incised on both sides, as in the seal of Joan, daughter of Henry II., King of England, on one side of which she is represented as Queen of Sicily, and on the other as Countess of Toulouse.

Before dealing with the matrix which was used in a press, it is necessary to consider the counter-seal or *contra sigillum*—that is, a seal impressed on the back of the main impression. The object of

this was to prevent forgery by making it more difficult for the seal to be detached from its tag. It would be comparatively easy to detach a seal if it were only impressed on one side, but the addition of another impression on the back made the task correspondingly difficult. A small seal was frequently used for this purpose, either a private seal, a ring signet, or gem, but there are about a dozen instances where a smaller matrix is expressly called in the inscription "contra sigillum," and the small seals of bishops with figures of saints and rhyming inscriptions were probably intended for use as counter-seals, and even seals *ad causas* were brought into service.

But in royal seals, in seals of corporations, and in some private seals the counter-seal was made the same size as the seal itself. To ensure the two impressions centring properly, the two matrices were provided with lugs, two, three, or four in number, through which stout pins were passed. Examples of these lugs may be seen in the illustrations of the seal and counter-seal of the city of Rochester (Figs. 2 and 9). The result was that when the wax was placed between the two matrices and they were pressed together the design was properly centred. To ensure further accuracy, a cross or nick is frequently found incised on the rims of the obverse—to use the numismatic term—and counter, and if these were one above the other when



FIG. 2.—SEAL OF THE CITY OF ROCHESTER (1).

the matrices were put together the two designs would both be the right way up.

An extraordinarily elaborate form of matrix may be mentioned here, of which the seals of Southwick and Boxgrove Priories are the most important, if not the only actual examples known. The latter is in the British Museum and the former in private hands. The peculiarity consists in the fact that both seal and counter-seal consist of two layers, part of the design being engraved on each.¹ When properly struck, small open-work panels were left in the upper surface, through which figures are seen below. The whole effect is most sumptuous, but to make an impression must have been an exceedingly laborious process—so much so, in fact, that at Boxgrove, at any rate, it appears to have been abandoned altogether, another matrix being made of the same design, but with the whole device on one face only.

The substance of which the impression was made was generally wax, sometimes mixed with hair. Some medieval specimens have recently been analyzed,² and it was found that in the earlier examples the wax used was beeswax, which later was mixed with resin. The pigments used were vermilion for the red seals and verdigris for the green, verdigris being also found in the black and brown seals. In many examples, however, no pigment was

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xxix., p. 101.

² *J. Chem. Soc.*, No. DCXVII., p. 795

used at all, the wax being left its natural colour. White seals with a brown glaze ■ also found.

But impressions were not always of wax. Papal bullæ ("bulla" is practically ■ synonym for seal, but is used for metal impressions) were of lead, occasionally of gold, while gold bullæ were used by the emperors and by the kings of Sicily, and one was especially made for Henry VIII. to seal the treaty made with Francis I. in 1527. Coenwulf, King of the Saxons, used a lead bulla, now preserved in the British Museum, while they were also used by many Mediterranean peoples—for example, the Templars and Hospitallers, the Latin Emperors of Constantinople, the Latin Kings and feudatories of Jerusalem, and many of the Sovereigns of Spain. The reason for the use of these leaden bullæ in southern countries was that the metal was less affected by climate and the heat than was wax.

The preservation of the impression from damage was a matter of great importance, as it affected the validity of the deed. It will be remembered that St. Louis refused to take advantage of the fact that ■ seal on a charter had been broken to such an extent as to make the document legally valueless.¹ For this reason or to assist in getting ■ better impression it was sometimes the practice to encircle the seal with ■ plaited band of straw or hay, ■ to press it into a large lump of natural

¹ Joinville, "Mémoires," Part I. (Bohn ed.), p. 366.

wax, which on the Continent frequently took the form of a regular saucer. More often the impressions were placed in a bag or metal case, which precaution, however, more generally resulted in their destruction than their preservation.

The methods adopted for affixing the impression to the document were two. In early documents, with the exception of those sealed with bullæ, it was customary to seal *en placard*—that is, the seal was impressed directly on to the face of the document. A slit was usually cut in the parchment, and the wax being pressed through the slit kept the seal from falling off. This system was general until the beginning of the eleventh century, and in France continued for royal seals so late as 1108, and intermittently until the close of the twelfth century,¹ to be revived again before the end of the thirteenth.² The other method, which was practically universal after the eleventh century and continued for four hundred years, and for some purposes still continues, was to hang the impression to the document. This was done in a variety of ways. A piece of parchment was cut along one edge nearly to the end, and on this the seal was impressed, the wax being put on both sides of the strip. Or a piece of parchment was put through a slit in the document, doubled back, and the two ends joined together

¹ Madden, in *Arch. Journ.*, xi., 261.

² Poole, "Seals and Documents," *Proc. Brit. Acad.*

with the seal; a strip of leather, or, most commonly of all, a cord, generally of twisted silk, was also used in the same way. It was this practice of hanging the seal to the charter that brought about the necessity, or at least the advisability, of using a counter-seal. Towards the end of the Middle Ages the system of sealing *en placard* came into use again,¹ paper frequently being laid over the wax or wafer before the impression was made, and it has degenerated into the present, almost universal, custom of stamping the seal directly on to the document by means of a steel die used in a press. It is to this custom of impressing a steel die directly on to the document that the present low state of the art of seal-engraving is due, as it is impossible for a matrix intended for use in this manner to be cut with any degree of high-relief.

It would be interesting to learn who were the artists who designed and engraved the matrices, but unfortunately the information at our disposal on this point is very scanty. Occasionally, a seal bears an initial or initials which may be the maker's signature, and it is possible by comparing a number of impressions to say definitely that certain of them must be by the same hand—for example, the seals of the city of Exeter and the borough of Taunton made about 1180. But whose that hand was we seldom know. Occasionally, however, entries in

¹ It is found again as early as under Edward III.: Poole, *op. cit.*

the Close and Issue Rolls, and in accounts, lift the curtain for a moment. Thus it is known that in 1218 Walter de Ripa made the great seal for Henry III.¹ and that William Geyton altered the great and other seals at the beginning of the reign of Richard II.² It must therefore have been this man who altered the name on Edward III.'s Brétigny seal, to adapt it for Richard's use. Peter de Hilltoft was King's engraver in 1392 and made various seals for sealing cloth sold³, whilst it is recorded that in 1423, John Barnes, goldsmith, added a secret sign to the great seal; that is, he made the small addition of a quatrefoil to Henry V.'s seal to adapt it to the use of Henry VI.⁴ To go back a couple of centuries, Simon the goldsmith is known to have made a seal for Canterbury Cathedral in 1221,⁵ and it has been suggested that William Torel, who designed the fine latten effigy of Eleanor, wife of Edward I., in Westminster Abbey, also designed her seal.⁶ In more modern days Thomas Simon, the finest of English medallists, designed the seals for Oliver Cromwell and Charles II., and from that date the names of the engravers of most of the royal seals are known.

¹ Close Rolls, 3 Henry III.

² Devon, "Issues of the Exchequer," p. 214.

³ Devon, "Issues of the Exchequer," p. 246.

⁴ Devon, "Issues of the Exchequer," p. 302; quoted with commendation by Wyon, "Great Seals," p. 49.

⁵ "Hist. MSS. Comm.," Appendix to Fifth Report, p. 441.

⁶ Lethaby, "Westminster Abbey," p. 287.

A certain amount of information is available as to the cost of matrices. The metal for the seal made for Canterbury by Simon the goldsmith, already mentioned, cost 5s. That was in 1221. The amount should be multiplied very many times to get present-day values. The seal of the Grocers' Company of London cost £2 16s. 8d. in 1431,¹ and that made for Cardinal Wolsey for his college at Oxford, now Christ Church, cost £15 11s. 8d., £10 for engraving and £5 11s. 8d. for the silver.² The seal of St. John's College, Cambridge, cost £1 6s. 8d. for engraving and 14s. 2d. for the silver;³ the fifth seal of Queens' College, Cambridge, cost 6s. 8d. for engraving,⁴ while the seal of office of the Chancellor of that University in 1580 cost 4s., besides 28s., the value of the silver of the old seals.⁵

A person did not always use his own seal. The best known instance of this is Henry III., who during his minority sealed with the seals of Cardinal Gualo, the papal legate, and of his governor, William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke.⁶ At the beginning of the third year of his reign, October, 1218, he used a seal of his own, and the event is noted in the Patent Roll by the entry, *hic incepit sigillum domini regis currere.* The first letters

¹ Kingdon, "MS. Archives of Company of Grocers," vol. ii., p. [204].

² Gutch, "Collect. curiosa," ii., 321.

³ Hope, in *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, x., p. 247.

⁴ Hope, in *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, x. p. 243.

⁵ Patent Roll, 1 Henry III.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 229.

issued under the new seal were a notification of its adoption. Numerous other examples of the practice could be cited; as, for instance, when the seal of a better known person is used for greater authenticity. It is clear, too, that in the Middle Ages notaries kept one or two matrices in their offices for the use of their clients, just as nowadays a solicitor keeps a supply of wafers. Such seals were probably procured on the death of the original owner, as they are generally small private seals, often heraldic, of a date earlier than the deed to which the impressions are attached, and the legends show that they had nothing to do with the persons sealing the document.

There are also numerous instances of the seal of one person or body being adapted at a later date, with or without alteration, to the use of another. Thus the hospital of Greatham, near Durham, took for its use the seal of Stephen Page, almoner to King Henry V., without any alteration at all. This seal is interesting, as it explains the otherwise inexplicable use of the device of a ship on the seal of the Lord High Almoner down to the present day. Stephen Page is represented holding in his hands a money-box in the shape of a ship on wheels. Subsequently, the ship came to be the sole device, a three-masted ship of the line in full sail, and its original significance was wholly forgotten. Another instance of an adapted seal is that of Ellis Davys'

Almshouses, Croydon, where the seal of the dean of the College of Stoke-by-Clare, Suffolk, has been adopted with the addition of the letters "E.D." for Ellis Davys in the field, but with no alteration in the legend. Tamworth College, Staffordshire, on the other hand, while using the matrix of a fifteenth-century bishop or abbot, had a new inscription cut in the place of the original one, and the coats of arms altered. The alteration in the blazon was not done quite effectively, and remains of the original shield of the royal arms can still be detected below the new charges.

Kings frequently used their predecessors' seals, altering the name if that were necessary, or sometimes adding a device if the names were the same. Thus Edward I. in his seal of absence used his father's seal with the alteration of the name (Fig. 1). Edward II. added to the great seal of his father two castles, in allusion to his mother, Eleanor of Castile, while Edward III., for his first seal, added to the same seal two fleurs-de-lis for his mother, Isabelle of France, in addition to his father's castles. Richard II., as has already been noted, used Edward III.'s Bretigny seal, merely altering the name "Edwardus" to "Ricardus," while the same seal was again used by Henry IV. with a similar alteration, and Henry V. used his father's seals without any alteration at all.

On the death of the owner, if an important

person, or on his changing his seal, the matrix was solemnly defaced and broken. The seals of bishops in the province of Canterbury were sent to the Archbishop, while the pieces of the seals of the bishops of Durham were solemnly offered at St. Cuthbert's shrine in their cathedral church.¹ In 1260 the first great seal of Henry III. was destroyed on October 18 in the king's presence at Westminster, and the fragments distributed to certain poor people belonging to religious houses.² Similarly on October 4, 1327, the first great seal of Edward III., which had already done duty for his father and grandfather, was broken at Nottingham in the king's presence and the pieces given by the Chancellor as a perquisite to his sealer.³ The seal of Philip and Mary was made in 1574 into a silver gilt cup by Sir Nicholas Bacon,⁴ and the disused seal is still the perquisite of the Lord Chancellor, who, after it has been formally defaced or "damasked" by the King, generally has the halves set in a salver or some other piece of plate.

The inscription or legend is in many ways the most important part of the device, but strangely enough, as will be seen, it did not always set forth the name of the owner. The inscription is usually in Latin, but is found in French and English, and

¹ Hope, in *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xi., 279, note.

² Quoted in *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xiii., 157.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xiii., 152.

this latter language becomes common by the seventeenth century. The simplest form begins with the word "sigillum" or "secretum," as the case may be, followed by the owner's name and rank in the genitive case. Kings and sometimes bishops



FIG. 3.—SEAL OF THE CHAPTER OF LINCOLN (1).

on their seals of dignity used the nominative case, omitting the word "sigillum" (Fig. 1). SIGILLVM : CAPITVLI : SANCTE : MARIE : LINCOLNIENSIS : ECCLESIE is the inscription on the seal of the chapter of Lincoln Cathedral (Fig. 3); S' DOMINI WILLELMI.

DE ECHINGHAM on that of Sir William Echingham (Fig. 12); and S. GERARDY : BRAIBROK on that of Gerard Braybrook (Fig. 10). The seal of the city of Winchester is inscribed SIGILL' : CIVIVM : WINTON-



FIG. 4.—SEAL OF THE CITY OF WINCHESTER (1).

IENSIVM (Fig. 4); that of Milton Abbey, Dorset, SIGILL : CONUENT : SANCTE : MARIE : MIDDLETONEN-SIS : ECL'IE (Fig. 7); and that of William Greenfield, Archbishop of York, has the legend s' WILL'I DEI GRA EBORACENCIS ARCHIEPI ANGL' PRIMATIS

(Fig. 5). These are the simplest forms of inscriptions and, as can be seen, the words are frequently much contracted, in some cases, indeed, only the initial letters being used. This is especially the case in the seals of foreign princes, who had such a multiplicity of titles that it would have been a sheer impossibility to include them all in the legend without contracting them to the utmost possible limit.

In many cases, however, the inscription is not a statement as to the owner of the seal but the invocation of a patron saint, a rhyming verse, or a little motto. Thus the counter-seal of Anthony Bek, Bishop of Durham, 1284, has for subject the Coronation of the Virgin and the legend ECCE : EXALTATA : ES : SR : CHOROS : ANGL'OR; that of St. Richard, Bishop of Chichester, 1245, has a figure of our Lord and the rhyming inscription TE : RICARDE : REGO : TRINVS : ET : VNVS : EGO; while that of Boniface of Savoy, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1245, has the martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury and the legend TRINE : DEVS : PRO : ME : MOVEAT : TE : PASSIO : THOME. Another more elaborate inscription of a similar character is on the counter-seal of Milton Abbey (Fig. 8), where the subject is the Annunciation, and the Virgin is addressed as the portal of salvation : PORTA : SALVTIS : AVE : P [ER]: TE : PATET: EXITVS : A : UE : UENIT : AB : EVA : VE : VE : Q [VIA] : TOLLIS : AUE.

Mottoes are especially common on small private seals. Examples are: IE SV SEL DE AMOVR LEI, on the seal of William Touchet; CHER AMI FETES PVR MAI, on that of Philip de Kyme; and A TVZ SALVZ, on that of John le Breton—all three on armorial seals from the Barons' letter, 1301. Other similar legends are VVLNERA QVINQVE DEI on a seal with the emblems of the Passion, and I CRAKE NVTTIS SWETE on one with a squirrel.

It should be noted here that the inscription commonly has a cross, star, or crescent, occasionally a pointing hand, to mark the beginning, and that the words are usually divided by one, two, or three dots, or by stars or sprigs of foliages; and that, except in very exceptional cases, the legend always begins at the top and not at the bottom, as is so frequent in modern seals.

The kinds of lettering used were three in number: Roman capitals, Lombardic capitals, and black letter. The former are used down to about 1170, when they insensibly change into a rude kind of Lombardic. This by 1215 has become good Lombardic, and continues to about 1350, when it changes into black letter, bold at first, but from about 1425 fine and close. After 1500 Roman capitals are again used.

The legend is almost always inscribed round the outer edge of the seal, generally in a border, but in later instances frequently on a scroll or ribbon.

The inscription is sometimes continued on the counter-seal, but usually the inscriptions on seal and counter-seal are quite independent, although often the same. In a few examples legends are impressed by a separate matrix round the rim, where the milling is on a coin. Instances are the second seal of Norwich Cathedral Priory, where this legend gives the date of the manufacture of the matrix, 1258; and Boxgrove Priory, where the inscription is a rhyming one. The object of these rim legends was of course to act as an additional preventive against forgery, the rim legend making it still more difficult, in fact impossible, to get the seal off the tag without damage.

Before dealing with the devices on seals it will be well to consider briefly their classification, and then to describe the devices common in each class.

Various methods of classification have been proposed and used. That by type is the most obvious and scientific, and in many ways the most useful, but it has the great disadvantage that, if carried to its logical conclusion, series belonging to one body or person are inevitably broken up. Thus the equestrian seal of a great nobleman would be in a different category to his armorial seal, and to be quite consistent the seal and counter-seal would often have to be divided. A more convenient plan is to divide the seals into classes, keeping all of one class together irrespective of the

type or device. A generally practical system would be the following.

1. ROYAL SEALS, containing the great seals, privy seals, and personal seals of Sovereigns; the seals of all members of the Royal Family; the seals of royal officials, such as admirals and sheriffs, of courts of law, and of particular jurisdictions.

2. ECCLESIASTICAL SEALS, consisting of seals of bishops, of capitular bodies and members of cathedral chapters, and diocesan officials; of monastic houses, including under this head abbots, priors, and obedientiaries; hospitals; religious gilds and fraternities; archdeacons; rural deans; collegiate churches; peculiars; and the clergy generally.

3. LOCAL SEALS, containing those of municipal corporations and officials; trade gilds and companies; universities and their colleges; and schools.

4. Finally, there would be a large division of PERSONAL or PRIVATE SEALS, containing those of all individuals in their private, as opposed to their official, capacity. This section would include seals of barons, knights, esquires, ladies, and ordinary folk, whether the design consisted of equestrian or other figures, of heraldry or of miscellaneous devices.

Most of the published catalogues of seals, such as those of the British Museum, of Douget D'Arcq, and of Demay, are arranged more or less on the

lines suggested, varying only as to whether their authors lean more to the typological or to the classificatory system. It need hardly be added that an alphabetical arrangement under the classes is obvious, except where a chronological one, as in the case of Sovereigns or bishops, can be introduced.

To deal now with the devices. These are of a very varied character, consisting of figures, representations of buildings, such as churches and castles, of scenes from the lives or martyrdoms of saints and other religious subjects, of ships, of quaint beasts such as delighted the medieval mind, of crosses, of flowers, and, most important and general of all, of heraldry, heraldry also being commonly used in combination with other devices.

First, in accordance with the suggested classification, to deal with the Royal Seals. Since William the Conqueror, the device on the great seal of the Sovereign, with but two exceptions, has been the same. On one side, generally the obverse but occasionally the counter, the Sovereign is shown in majesty, seated on a throne, wearing a crown and royal robes, and holding two sceptres (Fig. 1), or sceptre and orb. In the earlier seals the throne is a simple bench, but it becomes by degrees more and more elaborate. The crown, too, loses its early simple form and approximates closer to that worn at the present day, while the character of the sceptres also changes. Elaborate canopies with

niches first appear in the Bretigny seal of Edward III. (1360).

On the other side of the great seal the King is depicted on horseback, dressed in full armour, brandishing his sword, or in the earliest seals holding his lance, with his shield on his left arm. From the second seal of Richard I. (c. 1197), his leopard crest is on his helm and the royal arms on his shield, and, later, on his surcoat and the trappings of his horse, which is first represented galloping on Henry III.'s seal of absence. The style of the armour, of course, varies with the changes of fashion, and on Edward III.'s Bretigny seal the design is for the first time contained in a cusped circle of very beautiful workmanship. Queens, in spite of the fact that they could not be shown in armour, are yet shown on horseback, wearing their crown and royal robes. In fact, in only two great seals is the Sovereign not shown on horseback, the exceptions being the Union seal of Queen Anne (1707), which has an emblematic figure of Britannia, and the seal of the present King, where His Majesty is represented in naval uniform, standing on a quayside in front of his fleet. The two great seals of the Commonwealth also of necessity vary the usual design, on one side being a view of the House of Commons in session, and on the other a map of England and Ireland. The great seals were always

large, in some cases being upwards of five inches in diameter.

The privy seals were smaller, simpler, and without a counter-seal. The design consisted of a shield of the royal arms, with, intermittently from the time of Richard II., ostrich plumes, supported by lions, on either side. The signet was a small and more private seal with, for device, a shield of arms or a crown and monogram. Henry V. had a special signet engraved with an eagle. The seals of members of the Royal Family approximate so closely to personal seals that it will be more convenient to deal with them under that heading.

The seals of the courts of justice had on the obverse a figure of the King enthroned, and on the counter a shield of the royal arms, sometimes with supporters. Thus the shield on Richard III.'s seal for the Court of Common Pleas is supported by two boars, the well-known badge of that King, while under the Tudors the supporters were the greyhound and dragon, which have continued in use on certain judicial seals down to quite recent times.

Of the seals of royal officials the most interesting are those of the admirals. On these, as might be expected, is the representation of a ship with the sail blazoned with the admiral's arms, a lamp on the poop and a long pennon flying from the mast-head. Sheriffs of counties also had a seal exhibiting a castle with a shield of the sheriff's arms or his

crest, * with sometimes the name of the county inscribed in the field. A beautiful little matrix of ■ coroner of the royal household is in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries. It has for device a wheel and the coroner's verge or staff of office. It will be remembered that the coroner of the household is known as the coroner of the verge.

Among other royal seals may be mentioned those ordered to be used under the statute *de Mercatoribus* passed at Acton Burnell in 1283. The design of these consists of a crowned bust of the King, with flowing curly locks, and with a leopard on his breast. On either side of the King's head is a castle, except on the seals of Hull and Salisbury, where a ship and view of the cathedral, respectively, take its place. This seal was known as the King's seal, and was in the custody of the mayor of the town in which the act was in force. There were originally twenty-five such towns. The counter, known as the clerk's seal, as it was in his custody, was smaller and bore a variety of devices, that of Oxford, for example, having an ox crossing a ford and the legend *BOS OXONIE*. Other royal seals were those for customs, subsidies, the delivery of wool and hides and the various staples. Seals used for quasi-negotiable instruments, such as, for example, wardrobe debentures, were especially finely engraved, probably ■ a precaution against forgery.

Of ecclesiastical seals the first to merit attention

are those of bishops, with which for the present purpose may be grouped those of abbots and priors. In these, which, with but few exceptions, are of vesica shape, the bishop is represented standing,



FIG. 5.—SEAL OF WILLIAM GREENFIELD, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK, 1304-15 (1).

wearing mitre and Mass vestments, giving the blessing with his right hand and holding his crozier, or if an archbishop generally his cross, in his left. The earliest seals consist of a figure only, but after

a while additions were made to the design with the purpose of filling up the blank space on either side of the figure. A gem was sometimes inserted here,



FIG. 6.—SEAL OF ALEXANDER NEVILL, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK,
1374-88 (†).

or heads or emblems of the patron saints (Fig. 5), or shields of arms. Towards the middle of the thirteenth century a low canopy was added over

the head of the figure, seen in ■ later example in Fig. 5, and this canopy gradually increased in splendour, being filled with saints in niches, until it became the predominant feature in the design (Fig. 6). A figure of the patron saint, or a scene from his life or martyrdom, then came to take the main position under the canopy, and the bishop himself was relegated to a niche in the base of the composition, where he was represented kneeling in adoration. After the Reformation ■ scene from biblical history became the main subject, while the Crucifixion, in some cases, was engraved in place of a scene from the life of a saint, as in the second seal of Archbishop Cranmer, where the matrix is the same as his first seal, but the martyrdom of St. Thomas has been cut out and the Crucifixion substituted. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with but few exceptions, the seal consisted of a shield of arms only, surmounted by ■ mitre. The bishop's counter-seal and seal *ad causas* generally had for a device a saint with the bishop kneeling below, as in the later seals of dignity. The secret was usually armorial (Fig. 11).

The seals of cathedrals and conventual churches varied much in character. A common device was the representation, more or less conventionalized, of the church itself, as in the seal of Milton Abbey (Figs. 7 and 8). Or a patron saint might be the sole device, as on the seal of the cathedral at

Rochester with St. Andrew on his cross, or of the monastery of Bury with St. Edmund the King and Martyr. The Virgin and Child was naturally a very usual subject and examples are numerous. A fine early example is on the late twelfth-century



FIG. 7.—SEAL OF MILTON ABBEY, DORSET (1).

seal of Lincoln Cathedral (Fig. 3), but the most beautiful is on the middle thirteenth-century seal of Merton Priory, Surrey. Crosses are also found on some seals, such as those of Durham Cathedral Priory and of the Abbey of Waltham Holy Cross, where the holy cross is shown upheld by two angels.

The obedientiaries of monastic houses also sometimes had seals, as, for example, the almoner of Christ Church, Canterbury, who is represented with baskets of food for the poor. The devices on the seals of deans, archdeacons, the clergy generally,



FIG. 8.—COUNTER-SEAL OF MILTON ABBEY, DORSET (1).

collegiate churches, gilds, and hospitals, all followed in the main the lines of those dealt with above.

The designs on municipal seals were also very varied. A common subject was the guildhall or some other prominent building in the town, as on the seal of the city of Winchester (Fig. 4), and the

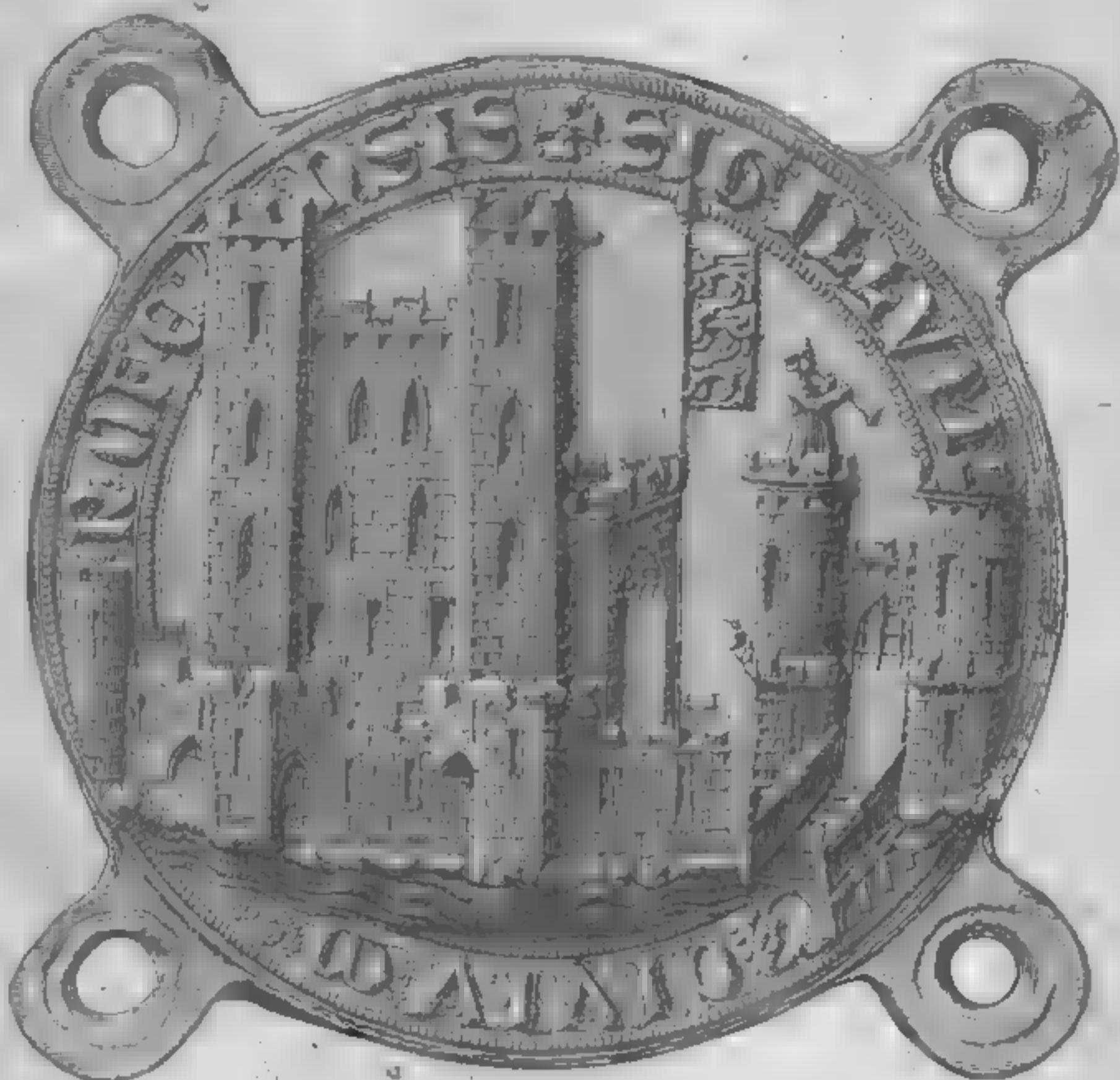


FIG. 9.—COUNTER-SEAL OF THE CITY OF ROCHESTER (1).

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counter-seal of the city of Rochester, on which is an extraordinarily faithful representation of the great tower of the castle, which is still the most prominent feature in that city (Fig. 9). A representation of the town itself with its towers, spires, and encircling walls is to be seen on the seals of London and Shrewsbury, while a bridge was a not uncommon device, as on the seal of Bridgwater. A design punning on the name of the town was often used when this was possible; examples are a hart in a pool for Hartlepool, a hart in a ford for Hertford, a Dane and a tree for Daventry, St. Oswald and a tree for Oswestry, conger eels and a tun for Congleton, and a deer for Derby. Again, the patron saint of the town is a common device, as St. Paul standing in the midst of the city on the seal of London, St. Andrew crucified on the seal of Rochester (Fig. 2), St. Nicholas on the counter-seal of Yarmouth, St. Martin dividing his cloak with the beggar on that of Dover, and the Virgin and Child on the counter-seal of the borough of Stamford. Ships are commonly represented on the seals of seaport towns, such as Dunwich, Southampton, Portsmouth, and Lyme Regis. A particularly fine series is to be found on the seals of the Cinque Port towns, that of Winchelsea being perhaps the finest, while that of Hastings is the most interesting, as it shows an early representation of a sea fight, one vessel being depicted ramming and cutting

another down to the waterline. Later, the arms of the town were placed on the seals, and it is interesting to notice that in many cases these arms were adapted from a device on an earlier seal, as, for example, Bristol and Norwich. The seals of the mayors generally had the same kind of device as those of their towns.

To the universities and colleges of Oxford and Cambridge belong a magnificent series of seals. Those of the universities, themselves, show the chancellor and members of the university seated in convocation. Those of the colleges frequently have a representation of the founders and patrons with saints, as Balliol and New Colleges, Oxford, and Pembroke and King's Colleges, Cambridge. Representations of saints are to be seen on the seal of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, with St. Catherine, and on Caius College, Cambridge, with the Annunciation. The well-known nominal device of the Holy Trinity is on the seal of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, while the other device of the Father holding the Crucifix on which rests the dove is on the beautiful seal of Trinity Hall. Queen's College, Oxford, on its first seal has a figure of its reputed founder, Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III., and on its second seal of Queen Elizabeth, its refounder, while Queens' College, Cambridge, on its sixth seal (seventeenth century) has also a figure of a queen, either Queen Margaret,

its first founder, or Queen Elizabeth Woodville its second. Seals with the arms only of the colleges are naturally common.

Many schools had seals, but these generally date from the foundations of Edward VI or Queen Elizabeth and are of no great merit, with the exception of the fine earlier seals of Winchester and Eton. A common device on these seals of grammar schools is the master teaching his pupils, a conspicuous feature being an enormous birch rod. In at least one instance, that of Louth Grammar School, Lincolnshire, the master is using this with considerable effect on the body of an unfortunate scholar.

The trade gilds of the towns, especially those of the city of London, also had the right of using a common seal, and some of these are of great beauty. Whilst the majority are purely heraldic, some show the implements of the craft, while on others is a figure of the patron saint of the gild, sometimes with a shield or shields of arms. Thus on the seal of the Armourers' Company is a figure of St. George slaying the dragon, while on the fine late seal of the Merchant Taylors' Company, made in 1502, is a figure of St. John Baptist with a small shield of the Company's arms below. In this connection attention may be drawn to a document in the British Museum (Add. Ch. 13946), to which are appended the seals of between twenty and thirty

of the trade gilds of Cologne, many of which, in addition to figures of saints and shields of arms, depict the implements of the craft.

The devices on the very large section of personal and private seals, to which for this purpose may be added those of the Royal Family, are of infinite variety. The great majority are heraldic and are amongst the most beautiful examples that have come down to us. In the earlier specimens the shield was placed by itself, without any adjuncts,



FIG. 10.—SEAL OF GERARD BRAYBROOK (1).

but more often it was shown hanging by its strap from a hook or tree, or surrounded by delicate tracery work (Fig. 10). With the introduction of supporters, the heraldic seals became still more elaborate, the full achievement of shield, crested and mantled helmet, and supporters being shown (Fig. 11). Sometimes one or more badges are added, as on the seal of Richard, Lord Grey of Codnor, 1392, with a gray or badger; of Walter, Lord Hungerford, c. 1420, who places his sickle badge on either side

of the sheaf of peppercorns which serves as his crest; or of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, 1401, who shows the bear and ragged staff. Banners of arms are also found, as on the seals of William, Lord FitzHugh and Marmion, 1429, and Margaret Lady Hungerford, 1462, as well as on the seal of Walter himself. Where all these heraldic seals are beautiful it is difficult to choose any for



FIG. 11.—SECRET OF ALEXANDER NEVILL, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK (1).

particular mention, but the seal of Archbishop Waldeby of York, for his regality of Hexham, 1390, though not strictly a personal seal, is especially noteworthy; while those of John, Earl of Warrenne and Surrey, 1254-1301, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, 1298, Elizabeth, the Lady of Clare, c. 1340, and of the Black Prince and the other sons of Edward III. are of outstanding merit.

Equestrian figures are common on the private seals of the great barons and magnates, as, for example, those of Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford, died 1295, Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, 1343, and Richard Nevill, the King Maker, c. 1460, where the figures are in armour,



FIG. 12.—SEAL OF SIR WILLIAM DE ECHINGHAM, died c. 1331 (4).

as is generally the case. But instances are known of equestrian figures in civil costume, as that of Earl Simon de Montfort, died 1265. A fine example of an equestrian seal of one of the lesser magnates is here illustrated (Fig. 12). On this little seal, Sir William de Echingham (died c. 1331) is shown

galloping on his horse in full armour, with his fretty coat on his shield and horse trappings and other shields in the field about the horse. Fine examples of heraldic and equestrian seals are to be seen on that precious document, precious both from the point of view of the historian and the student of seals, the Barons' letter to the Pope in 1301 on the subject of the kingdom of Scotland, the two copies of which are preserved in the Public Record Office. Another device found in a few early seals is that of a knight, on foot, fighting a lion; examples are the seals of Hugh Neville, died 1235, and Roger de Quincey, Earl of Winchester, died 1264.

Figures of ladies occur on seals down to about the middle of the fourteenth century. These seals are usually vesica shaped, and show the lady standing, holding up in either hand a shield of her own and of her husband's arms, as on the seal of Hawes, Lady of Keveoloc, c. 1310, or holding a hawk by the jesses. Sometimes their gowns and mantles are embroidered with coats of arms. At least one lady, Elizabeth, Lady of Scuore, appears on horseback on her seal.

Beasts and floral devices are commonly found on the seals of persons who were not entitled to bear arms. Such devices are crescents and stars, griffins, wyverns, human-headed monsters, birds, and animals disporting themselves with that naïveté of which the medieval artist was so fond

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and at depicting which he was such a master. Floral devices are generally very conventional, consisting of a leaf or leaves, of a five or six-petaled flower, or of a rose.

A few suggestions as to the dating of seals may not be out of place here. First of all, it must be remembered that the date of the deed to which the seal is attached can be but rarely the date of the matrix. This is so obvious as to need no amplification. One of the best tests is the style of the lettering. This was first worked out by the late Sir William St. John Hope in his paper on the seals of English bishops, published more than thirty years ago.¹ The dates of the various styles of lettering have already been referred to when dealing with the inscriptions. Here it is only necessary to add the caution that the dates for the beginning and end of a style must not be adhered to too rigidly, as there was an inevitable period of overlap. It must also be remembered that on the Continent the changes in the style of lettering were on the whole earlier than in this country. With these cautions Sir William Hope's suggestions form a sound working principle, and it is not easy to go very far wrong in using them.

Costume is also a good general guide as to date, although the minuteness of the detail on a seal does not make this so reliable as in the case of monu-

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, xi., 271.

ments. Again the style of the architecture in the canopies and other accessories forms a good criterion, as also does the manner in which the heraldry is drawn. But of all these guides the style of lettering is the best. The only sure criterion, however, is the general character of the work, and to judge this needs long practice and the handling of many examples.

The dates of certain matrices are, however fixed definitely, either by documentary evidence, such as an entry of manufacture in account rolls, by the fact that the date of the beginning of the reign of a Sovereign or of the consecration of a bishop is known, or by the date itself being added to the inscription or engraved on some part of the seal itself. By comparison, therefore, with a dated example it is possible to date others of like character and design. Thus the seal of Milton Abbey (Figs. 7 and 8) is clearly by the same hand or of the same school as that of Norwich Cathedral, and as this is dated 1258 the date of the Milton seal must be about the same. Both these seals, too, are so like the third seal of Canterbury Cathedral, made in 1233, that it is permissible to consider that all three are from the same workshop.

Entries in accounts have been mentioned already. Documentary evidence of another kind is found occasionally in monastic Chronicles. In the Annals of Waverley¹ it is stated under the year 1241 that

¹ Rolls Series, 36, vol. ii., p. 329.

the silver seal of the Priory of Merton, Surrey, was renewed (*innovatum*) in that year, and that it was received on the eve of the feast of St. Lucy, that is on December 12. This entry refers to the magnificent seal of the priory, with the figure of the Virgin and Child on one side and of St. Augustine on the other, which is probably the finest matrix that has ever been cut.

Dated matrices are not uncommon. The inscription on the seal of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, reads : HOC : SIGILL : FACTVM : EST : ANNO : DCIMO I : RICARDI : REGIS : ANGLOR—*i.e.*, 10 Richard I., 1199; on the counter of the second seal of Winchester Cathedral Priory is the legend: FACTVM : ANNO : GR̄E : M̄ : C̄ : NONAGES' : III : ET : ANNO : REGNI : REGIS : EDWARDI : XXII—*i.e.*, 1294, 22 Edward I.; the seal of Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, is inscribed : S' THOE : COMITIS : WARRWYCHIE : ANNO : REGNI : REGIS : E' : T' CII : POST : COQVESTV : ANGLIE : SEPTIO DECIO : ET : REGNI : SVI : FRANCIE : QVARTO—*i.e.*, 17 Edward III., 1343; while, to come down to a much later date, the seal of Trinity College, Cambridge, bears the legend FACTVM : ANNO : GRACIE : 1546 : HENRICI : 8 : 38. The second mayoralty seal of the borough of Maidstone is more definite still, being inscribed SIGILLVM · MAIORAT · VILLE ; DE · MAYDSTONE · MVTATVM · 20 · DIE · FEBR · ANO · 1567. It will be noticed that these last two examples are dated in Arabic numerals.

This practice begins in the fifteenth century and frequently the date is added at the end of the legend or in the field. It becomes fairly common in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries, but a word of caution is here necessary, as the date is not always that of the matrix, but of the incorporation of the town or of the foundation of the cathedral or see.

In conclusion, an attempt may be made to examine briefly the rise and fall of the art of seal-engraving. To treat this adequately would require a wealth of illustration impossible here, but anyone who has the opportunity of studying a number of specimens or of examining the illustrations in such work as Wyon's *Great Seals of England*, will be able to follow the tentative suggestions here made.

In the early days after the revival the art is archaic and crude, the drawing ill-proportioned, the relief on the whole low, and the lettering badly spaced and ranged. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, however, the seal-engraver has thoroughly mastered his art, and thenceforward progress is rapid. The design now is in higher relief and far more spirited; the space to be treated is well filled but not overloaded, and the drawing is good. Canopy work is kept subordinate to the main subject, and the figures are full of dignity. The seal of Merton Priory, made in 1241, may be taken as the summit of the art, and from that date it remained at a high level of excellence for two

hundred years, although, to some eyes, ■ deterioration in design, though not in technique, may be seen after some three-quarters of ■ century. The seals, although finely engraved, become by the first quarter of the fourteenth century overloaded with detail. Canopies tend to become more and more elaborate and filled with figures in tabernacles, and the main figures are more and more subordinate. The relief is generally lower and the simplicity which gave the earlier seals their great charm and beauty is lost. It must not be understood by this that the workmanship is inferior, for this is not so. It required as great skill to engrave the elaborate seals of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries ■ it did to engrave the simpler ones of the thirteenth. Nor is the drawing inferior. The difference is that the design has lost its early freshness and simplicity and become complicated and over-elaborate. Compare, for example, the fine seal of dignity of Alexander Nevill, Archbishop of York (Fig. 6), with that of his predecessor, William Greenfield (Fig. 5). Both are fine pieces of engraving, that of Archbishop Nevill being the finer, but in the later seal the figure has become a subordinate part of the design, while in the earlier it is the predominating feature. The simplicity of the earlier work has given place to the greater detail of the later, and the general design has lost. The same characteristics may be noticed, but to a

lesser degree, in heraldic seals. Here again the simplicity of the earlier examples gives place to greater elaboration, and although the technique is fine, if not finer, the purity of the design has deteriorated. With the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came the Renaissance, when the whole design changes, classical motives taking the place of Gothic, and with the change the art of seal-engraving loses most of its cunning, and the result is a rapid decline sinking into the abyss of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Till quite recent years it was the fashion to deify English art in favour of continental, and when any fine piece of work of doubtful provenance was in dispute to consider it the product of a French or Flemish workshop. This belittling of things English is now happily becoming a thing of the past, and it is being recognized that, in most respects, the arts in England were in no way inferior to those of the Continent. In no branch of art is the high standard of English craftsmanship more in evidence than in that of seal-engraving, and the handcraft of the English artist at its highest was never surpassed, if it was ever indeed equalled, by his brother-workman on the Continent of Europe.

As this little book may possibly inspire some of its readers to form a collection, a few suggestions and cautions may be useful. It is perhaps needless

to say that the great majority of seals in almost all collections are not originals, but casts made from impressions.* To make these casts requires patience and practice. First; a mould has to be made from the impression. For this purpose modelling or paraffin wax may be used, but a better composition consists of 1 lb. of well-dried and sifted whitening, with 4 oz. of beeswax and 4 oz. of lard. The two last should be melted and the whitening added by degrees and stirred in. The more the mixture is worked after getting cold, the better it gets. To make a mould, work a large enough piece in the hands until fairly soft. Then flatten it out to a little over the size of the seal, apply, and squeeze it all over; not too hard at first, but afterwards firmly, especially over the deep parts and inscriptions. Wet it before applying to the seal, to prevent it sticking, and let it get cold before removing. Casts can then be made from the mould in plaster of Paris, sulphur, or gutta-percha. A paper collar should be fixed round the mould, and then the plaster poured in and left till dry, when it should be easily removable. Care must be taken to prevent air-bubbles. Casts of seals in museums can generally be purchased at prices varying with their size.

Some few people may be in a position to collect matrices, but medieval ones are rare to come by, and when they do come into the market fetch high

prices. Collectors must be warned against a large number of casts of matrices which are often turning up and are sometimes difficult to distinguish from the real thing. Where these are, however, made from an impression they can generally be detected by a simple test. On an impression being taken the parts in high-relief are often rubbed and indistinct, because those are the parts of an impression which most easily get worn. But it is obvious that, if the matrix is genuine, it is just those parts in highest relief which should be the most sharp, because being the portions most deeply incised they must be the least rubbed in the matrix itself. Therefore, if on an impression being taken it is found that the parts in high-relief are rubbed and not sharp, the matrix may be at once rejected as a cast.

After starting a collection, the next thing is to classify and catalogue it. A system of classification has already been suggested, so this need not be further enlarged upon here. Satisfactory cataloguing is harder. It is obvious that the shape, size, inscription, style of lettering, and blazon of any coats of arms must be given. A more difficult matter is description. A considerable experience has convinced the present writer that no written description can possibly enable a seal to be visualized if it is unknown to the reader. What, therefore, must be aimed at is to enable a seal to be

recognized instantly by the catalogue, when it comes to hand, without having to look up and compare another specimen. It should be possible, that is to say, to tell at once by reference to the catalogue whether any specimen is already in the collection or not. The ideal catalogue would be one which had a photograph or accurate drawing of every seal alongside the description, in which case this could be reduced to a minimum. But this is a counsel of perfection and hardly practicable. For those fortunate persons who are able to form a collection of original impressions attached to documents, reference may be made to Mr. Johnson's book on *The Care of Documents*, published in this series.

The writer's thanks are due to the Council of the Society of Antiquaries for the loan of the blocks, and to Lady Hope for placing at his disposal much of the material collected by her husband, the late Sir William St. John Hope, by whose practised hand, but for his untimely death, this little book would have been written.

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